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S E C R E T ASHGABAT 000741

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/25/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KIRF](#) [TX](#)
SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN GOVERNMENT REQUESTS USCIRF DEL
POSTPONE VISIT, "BUT WE WILL WELCOME THEM, WE WILL HAVE A
SUCCESSFUL VISIT"

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Ambassador Richard Hoagland for reason
s 1.4(B) and (D).

SECRET

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN GOVERNMENT REQUESTS USCIRF DEL
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¶1. (SBU) After weeks of back and forth, and recent days of nearly hourly promises that the letters of invitation would be ready on time, Charge met with America's Desk Director Serdar Bashimov on July 25 to press for him to hand over the letters of invitation necessary for the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) delegation to arrive in Ashgabat as planned. Charge met with Bashimov because Foreign Minister Rashit Meredov was once again out of town on official travel.

¶2. (C) Charge emphasized Secretary of State Rice said in January we have "turned a new page" in the bilateral relationship. He stressed that this visit will be a litmus test of the Government of Turkmenistan's commitment to that new relationship. He noted that Turkmenistan, by delaying issuance of the letters of invitation, has caused this visit to rise to the attention of very high levels in the U.S. Government. He said, "You do not want to undo all the good work we have accomplished together in the last six months."

¶3. (SBU) Bashimov replied firmly, "We want this visit to happen. We will make it a good visit. But we have to ask that it be pushed back until the end of August. We (the Government of Turkmenistan) are simply overwhelmed with visits."

¶4. (C) Charge asked if this is sending a political message. Bashimov replied, "Absolutely not." Charge asked if Bashimov can guarantee the visit will happen by the end of August. Bashimov said, "Please don't use the word 'guarantee,' because I am not authorized to say that." He then repeated Turkmenistan would welcome the USCIRF delegation and would make it a productive visit.

¶5. (U) Charge said he would transmit this message immediately to Washington.

¶6. (S) Charge requested Bashimov walk with him out of the Foreign Ministry. He asked Bashimov bluntly, "Does your president or his advisers oppose this visit?" Bashimov replied, "Absolutely not." Charge asked, "Does the Ministry of National Security oppose this visit?" Bashimov replied, "No, we are long past that stage. We want this visit to

happen. We will make it a good visit."

17. (C) CHARGE'S COMMENT: Since my March-April stint as Charge in Ashgabat, I have worked frankly, and sometimes bluntly, with Turkmenistan's senior officials. I know that this proposed visit stimulated vigorous -- and lengthy -- debate within the government because it touches on one of the most sensitive issues. I also know that as the world has beat a path to Ashgabat in the last six months, the government has had to paddle ever harder to stay above water.

Because of the ponderous system of doing all business -- both high-level and niggling -- by diplomatic note, the understaffed and inexperienced Foreign Ministry is worked to a frazzle. I am prepared to believe, until it's proven otherwise, this government simply is not yet prepared operationally to host this delegation. I recommend, if USCIRF concurs, that we accept the visit be postponed by several weeks. I will work with the Foreign Minister and his senior staff to ensure that they commit to a concrete date.

END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND